

## Background paper series

### Finding Sustainable Housing Solutions for Migrants

Accessing adequate accommodation is a basic human right, which is enshrined in various human rights charters. Adequate housing is also an integral factor for the enjoyment of social, economic, and cultural rights. Inadequate housing conditions may cause poor health outcomes and reduced educational and employment opportunities. According to the United Nations (UN) Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,<sup>i</sup> satisfactory housing consists of legal security of tenure; availability of accessible services, facilities and infrastructure; habitability; physical accessibility for persons with reduced mobility/disabilities (e.g. access to employment, health services, schools, etc.); cultural adequacy; and affordability.

OECD 2018 data<sup>ii</sup> on living conditions of immigrants show that almost 17 million immigrants in the OECD and over 7 million in the EU live in overcrowded accommodation – a rate of 17% in both areas, against 8% and 11% among the native-born, respectively. The widest differences between the foreign- and native-born occur in Austria, Greece and Italy, where they exceed 20 percentage points. The foreign-born overcrowding rate rose particularly in longstanding European destinations such as Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom over the last decade. In the EU, one foreign-born in four (whether from inside or outside the EU) lives in substandard housing against one in five native-born. Differences between the two are particularly marked in Southern Europe and in some longstanding European destinations, such as Belgium, the Netherlands, the UK and Austria.

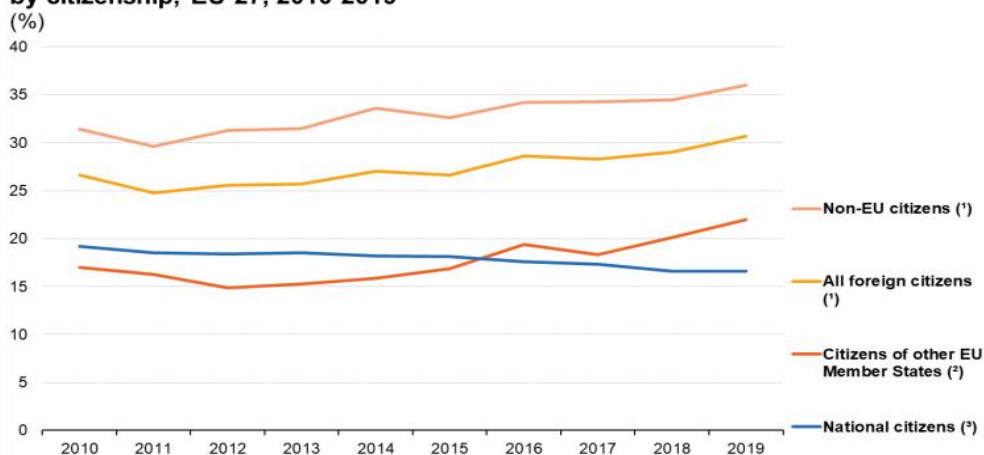
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In 2019, the highest housing cost overburden rate<sup>1</sup> in the EU-27 was recorded for non-EU citizens (25 %), while lower rates were observed for citizens from other EU countries (19 %) and national citizens (9 %).<sup>iii</sup>

**Overcrowding rate among the population aged 20-64 years, by citizenship, EU-27, 2010-2019**



(<sup>1</sup>) 2010 and 2011: low reliability. 2012-2019: estimates.  
(<sup>2</sup>) Low reliability.  
(<sup>3</sup>) Estimates.

eurostat

Immigrants make up a significant proportion of the homeless population in the European Union. Although detailed data on migrant homelessness is not systematically available in all Member States, a recent Abbé Pierre Foundation and Feantsa report<sup>iv</sup> shows that foreign nationals are overrepresented among the homeless (e.g. a quarter of homeless families in Finland are immigrants, 52.3% of homeless people in Barcelona are third-country nationals).

Migrant women in the EU are more likely to be pushed into homelessness due to lack of legislative support to accessing housing, gender-based violence combined with a dependent migration status linked to an abusive partner and several forms of economic and social marginalisation.<sup>v</sup>

Housing inequalities have been greatly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and people living in inadequate and unsanitary housing were more likely to feel entrapped due to confinement measures. Economic recession due to protective measures to cope with the epidemic has made poor households extremely vulnerable with rising housing costs.<sup>vi</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The **housing cost overburden rate** is the percentage of the population living in households where the total housing costs ('net' of housing allowances) represent more than 40 % of disposable income ('net' of housing allowances).

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## **Discrimination in the Housing Market**

According to the EU-MIDIS II survey,<sup>vii</sup> discrimination in access to housing appears to mostly affect Roma and people with North African background: around every tenth Roma respondent and respondent of North African background (12 % and 9 %, respectively) felt discriminated against because of their ethnic or immigrant background when trying to rent or buy an apartment or a house. First or last names are most often perceived as a reason for discrimination when migrants look for housing (44 %). According to recent research<sup>viii</sup> carried out on behalf of the city council, one third of private rental housing agencies in Amsterdam discriminate against people with foreign names. EU-MIDIS II survey respondents are less likely to report housing discrimination incidents to any organisation or authority since they thought nothing would happen or change as a result of reporting (42 %), they found it too trivial to report (23%<sup>o</sup>), or they had no proof (25%).

## **Policy Framework in the EU**

The EU Common Basic Principles on Immigrant Integration<sup>ix</sup> underline that ‘access for immigrants to institutions, as well as to public and private goods and services, on a basis equal to national citizens and in a non-discriminatory way, is a critical foundation for better integration.’ One of the principles of European Pillar of Social Rights<sup>x</sup> is to provide those in need and vulnerable people with access to social housing or quality housing assistance. The Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness<sup>xi</sup> also acknowledges the need to understand the specific situation of migrants and ethnic minorities in addressing homelessness. However, limited access to adequate and affordable housing for migrants is still an obstacle to integration in most Member States.

## **Addressing the Challenge: Policy Solutions and Promising Practices**

### *Monitoring Homelessness across Europe*

Although Eurostat-SILC<sup>xii</sup> assesses housing difficulties via ad-hoc modules, it has been insufficient to systematically monitor and assess housing conditions of migrants and homeless persons. Existing resources and expertise should be mobilised to initiate and finance relevant research programmes, to collect qualitative and quantitative data and to conduct surveys on housing deprivation, in order to monitor developments and guide counter measures in this field.

### *Integrated Approach to Housing Exclusion and Homelessness*

Prevention of homelessness should be a long-term and integrated public policy to provide everyone with equal access to adequate accommodation. This integrated approach is reflected in the [Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027](#) of

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migrants and Beneficiaries of International Protection (BIP). Access to housing is one of the thematic areas of the plan and, together with access to health, to education and to the labour market, they are prerequisites for integration. Therefore, adopting a comprehensive and all-inclusive policy approach is crucial to make it sustainable. Multistakeholder partnerships with relevant partners, such as civil society organisations, socio-economic partners and migrants, play a key role in achieving a truly effective and comprehensive housing integration policy.

Member States have the opportunity to make full use of EU support through funding, developing practical tools, coordinating actions and establishing relevant partnerships to develop integrated strategies for the elimination of homelessness and housing exclusion.

In addition, [the European Integration Network](#) can be instrumental to promote mutual learning and exchanges of good practices between Member States to combat housing exclusion. For example, it can support peer exchanges for the development of alternative approaches for the provision of housing in Member States lacking social housing policies.

Finally, [the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness](#) can also provide a forum for mutual learning activities and the exchange of good practices on combatting homelessness, including homelessness among migrants.

**Curing the Limbo** (2018-2021) is a European pilot program of the City of Athens implemented with the strategic partnership of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, the Catholic Relief Services, the International Rescue Committee and the Athens Development and Destination Management Agency. This project is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund through the Urban Innovative Actions initiative. The project developed an affordable housing model to assist refugees in the transition from temporary emergency assistance solutions to independent living in Athens. The goal was to create a sustainable housing model that fits the characteristics of the Athenian housing markets, encouraging landlords to join the project. For this purpose, the project created a housing facilitation unit based on a social rental agency which provides a range of services.

**The CICSENE housing programme** (draws on a mix of resources (public and private contributions) and has been involved in different projects funded by AMIF) mediates between home owners and disadvantaged groups who do not have easy access to housing. Providing different services, ranging from legal advice to matching and intermediation, it supports both people who own a home and vulnerable people who often face obstacles in accessing housing. Among its beneficiaries, 70% are migrants. Since 2002, CICSENE has supported 2300 households in Turin to find housing solutions. More than 8000 home owners have been contacted.

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*Tailored Housing Services for Migrants*

It is crucial for migrants to receive clear, precise information about opportunities, rights and duties regarding renting or buying accommodation. Local authorities should pay attention to migrants' interests by seeking the opinion of migrant organisations or consultative bodies. To avoid housing overcrowding and poor-quality living conditions, competent authorities should carry out inspections to ensure that migrants' dwellings are fit for habitation and meet requirements regarding safety, fire prevention and hygiene.

**Casas sin Gente para Gente sin Casa**

(started in 2018 with funding by private donations and grants): Empty Houses for the Homeless Project helps refugees in Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain find their homes by establishing strong trust between them and the owners of empty properties through the use of collaborative law and 'conscious contracts'. In 15 months, six empty homes were included in the conscious rental scheme and 20 people found accommodation. So far, 15 volunteers have joined the project during its first two years. The project currently operates in Vitoria-Gasteiz, with plans to expand in the region, as well as the EU and the USA. In the next three years, more than 200 empty homes are expected to be provide accommodation to 800 tenants from vulnerable groups.

[The Welcome Home programme \(Witaj w domu\)](#) (started in 2016 with funding from a mix of private sources) provides housing support for refugee families at risk of homelessness. Currently operating in Warsaw, the programme rents flats from landlords and subsequently sublets these flats to refugee families, charging a below-market rent that they can afford. The rent is gradually increased over a period of two to three years until the family gains independence and can pay it in full. Participants in the programme also receive other types of support, including assistance from specialists and Polish language lessons. As of August 2019, the programme was supporting 10 families (53 people, including 33 children). Another 10 families were waiting to join.

*Consolidated Funding to Avoid Housing Exclusion for Migrants*

Member States can use the EU grants and loans such as the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and InvestEU to promote adequate and affordable housing (including social housing in accordance with identified needs at national and regional level), to support access to housing and to advance policy measures to tackle homelessness.



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## Guiding Questions for the Workshop

- What are the specific challenges migrants face in getting access to adequate and affordable housing?
- How can EU funding help to promote adequate and affordable housing for migrants?
- What are the innovative and alternative approaches to support access to adequate housing for migrants?

## References

<sup>i</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/housing/pages/internationalstandards.aspx>

<sup>ii</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Staff. (2019). Settling in 2018: Indicators of immigrant integration. OECD.

<sup>iii</sup> Eurostat. (2019). Migrant Integration Statistics Housing [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migrant\\_integration\\_statistics\\_-\\_housing](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migrant_integration_statistics_-_housing)

<sup>iv</sup> Abbé Pierre Foundation, & FEANTSA. (2020). Fifth Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe 2020.

<sup>v</sup> FEANTSA. (2020). Homelessness among Migrant Women in the EU. [https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/News/Homelessness\\_Among\\_Migrant\\_Women\\_in\\_the\\_EU\\_\(final\).pdf](https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/News/Homelessness_Among_Migrant_Women_in_the_EU_(final).pdf)

<sup>vi</sup> Abbé Pierre Foundation, & FEANTSA. (2020). Fifth Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe 2020.

<sup>vii</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). (2017). Second European Union minorities and discrimination survey: Main results. [EU MIDIS II]. Vienna: Author.

<sup>viii</sup> Andriessen, I., & Wittebrood, K. DISCRIMINATIE OP DE WONINGMARKT. <https://www.rigo.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/RIGO-Discriminatie-op-de-Amsterdamse-woningmarkt-def.pdf>

<sup>ix</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/librarydoc/common-basic-principles-for-immigrant-integration-policy-in-the-eu>

<sup>x</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en)

<sup>xi</sup> <https://www.2021portugal.eu/en/news/lisbon-declaration-on-the-european-platform-on-combatting-homelessness/#:~:text=WE%20agree%20to%20launch%20together,safe%20and%20appropriate%20emergency%20accommodation%3B&text=no%20one%20is%20discriminated%20against%20due%20to%20their%20homelessness%20status.>

<sup>xii</sup> For ad-hoc modules on housing difficulties <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/income-and-living-conditions/data/ad-hoc-modules>

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